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ABSTRACT

The literature on the practice of educational evaluation is reviewed, and internal and external evaluations in a school setting are compared. The paper states that the typical external evaluation is conducted as if school districts were rational organizations, a view which permeated 19th century evaluation activities. The internal evaluator, on the other hand, has a view from the inside, making it possible to see first hand the complex, somewhat disorderly environment of a school system. Evaluation was introduced into educational administration in the middle of the 19th century. However, when the collection of facts failed to solve the problems of education, educational administrators became disillusioned. Evaluation was limited primarily to the assessment of individual student achievement from the 1930s until the 1970s. The advent of federally-funded instructional programs in the 1960s prompted a revival of interest in evaluation. Recently, evaluators have not applied the major evaluation models to the evaluation of school systems, perhaps because the practice of internal evaluation focuses less on "program evaluation" than on operations research. The internal evaluator is an employee who holds primary responsibility for the organization's self evaluation. Information is provided to school staff in ways which are suitable to the administrators' decision-making styles. (GDC)

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The Practice of Educational Evaluation: A View From the Inside

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The Practice of Educational Evaluation: A View From the Inside

Educational evaluation activities are conducted by internal evaluators, who are employed within the system, or by external evaluators, who are not employees of the system. For both, the practice of evaluation may be defined as the collection of information which can be used "to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions with regard to what . . . programs, personnel, or products are doing and effecting" (Patton, 1982, p. 35). The authors of this paper believe that what differs for internal and external evaluators is their view of the world of an educational organization. The authors believe that most external evaluators accept the traditional rational model--where decision making follows an efficient, orderly pattern--as the dominant framework for how school systems work. Patterson, Purkey, and Parker (1986, p. 23) disagree with this widely-accepted view of reality, arguing that there is "a growing consensus that, in general, the world in which schools exist is not rational and school district organizations, in particular, can't be described using the rational model." They believe that educational organizations can be described as nonrational systems. According to the nonrational model, schools as organizations do not always behave in a logical, predictable manner. Schools operate in a world filled with change and uncertainty; and they serve multiple constituencies, thereby necessitating multiple and often conflicting or competing goals.

The authors of this paper believe that the typical external evaluation is conducted as if school districts were rational organizations, a view which permeated nineteenth century evaluation activities. The internal evaluator, on

the other hand, has a view from the inside, where he can see first hand the complex, somewhat disorderly environment of a school system.

Rational View

Educational leaders introduced data collection/analysis procedures into the administration and management of education toward the middle of the nineteenth century. As early as 1845, for example, the Boston School Committee administered writing and grammar surveys to a sample of students (Travers, 1983). Moreover, this first formal evaluation effort had a hidden policy agenda: "It was the gathering of data for inter-school comparisons that could be used in decisions concerning the annual appointment of head masters" (Madaus, Scriven, and Stufflebeam, 1983, p. 6). Such leaders as Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, and William Torrey Harris "demonstrated that the collection of facts was a vital requirement for establishing sound educational policies" (Travers, 1983, p. 1). Indeed, Horace Mann "hailed the enterprise as the dawn of a new era" in which school policy would come to rest partially on the collection of facts (Travers, 1983, p. 86).

By the turn of the century, educational surveys had become "an established means of collecting data about educational problems" (Travers, 1983, p. 109). Not only did large school systems administer their own surveys, but the practice of using outside authorities to conduct surveys also emerged. Eventually, the Federal Bureau of Education argued that its original mandate "to collect whatever statistics were necessary to maintain efficient school systems was a clear mandate to engage in the making of surveys" (Travers, 1983, p. 130). By 1915, 30 to 40 large school systems were involved in surveys concerning expenditures, pupil dropout/promotion rates, and/or teacher efficiency, as well as student achievement. School systems typically created bureaus or departments "specif-

ically to improve the efficiency of the district" (Madaus, et al., 1983, p. 7).

The idea of scientific management, with its attendant emphasis on systemization, standardization, and efficiency, soon became a powerful force in educational administrative theory. Although the new techniques were widely referred to as scientific, Travers (1983) indicates that:

> The methods were more orderly and methodical than any that had preceded them, and they had the potential for providing knowledge about education of a kind that had never been available before, but they were hardly scientific. (pp. 132-133)

The methods were called scientific partly because they derived from the new discipline of educational research that Thorndike was developing at Teachers College (Travers, 1983). Unfortunately, educational administrators misinterpreted Thorndike's insistence that the gathering of facts was the core of scientific inquiry: they erroneously assumed that the study of "facts" obtained from surveys would improve the efficiency of education. When scientific management failed to solve the problems of education, educational administrators quickly became disillusioned. Although standardized testing increased tremendously after World War I, evaluation studies virtually ceased to exist by the late 1930's. Evaluation was limited primarily to the assessment of individual student achievement and "virtually nothing was ever done with the results" (Travers, 1983, p. 145). Not until the early 1970's did evaluation again serve as a tool for management.

Madaus, et al. (1983, p. 8) labeled the period 1930-1945 "The Tylerian Age." Ralph Tyler's conceptualization of educational evaluation as the comparison of intended to actual outcomes "dominated the practice of educational evaluation during the 1940's and the 1950's" (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational

Evaluation, 1981, p. 2). It also influenced the growth of standardized testing and facilitated the development of taxonomies of educational objectives during these decades.

The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1981) indicates that:

> Major reforms in education have consistently been accompanied by major reforms in methods of evaluation. In the 1930's, '40's, and '50's, the advances in evaluation were mainly in assessing student performance. Starting in the 1960's, however, there were, in addition, many developments related to the assessment of educational programs, projects, and materials. (p. 2)

The advent of federally-funded instructional programs in the 1960's prompted a revival of interest in evaluation. With funding contingent on the evaluation of these programs, school districts found it necessary to draw evaluators from the ranks of university-based researchers. Rose and Nyre (1977, p. 4) describe these early practitioners as academics trained in research or measurement who clung "tenaciously to the classical experimental model with which they were familiar." It soon became apparent that the designs they transplanted from educational research were inappropriate for most educational programs. By the early 1970's, some 50 alternative approaches to evaluation had been developed (Steele, 1973) and universities had begun to offer graduate programs in evaluation (Madaus, et al., 1983).

Nonrational View

As graduates of the training programs accepted positions in large school systems, they brought with them the evaluation models they had been taught to use. Their practice of evaluation in these systems, however, differed substantially from that presented in graduate textbooks and courses. The results of

intensive case studies of local educational evaluations in California (Alkin, Daillak, and White, 1979, p. 240) are instructive: although evaluators were familiar with the major evaluation models, "they did not attempt to systematically apply any of them nor did they draw upon the concepts or procedures of the formal models in any specially significant, or readily apparent way."

Perhaps the reason for the non-use of these models is that the practice of internal evaluation focuses less on "program evaluation" than on operations research, which Cooley and Bickel (1986, p. 1) describe as involving "a continuous activity of data collection, analysis, and feedback to policy shapers and managers of educational systems." As Love (1983, p. 1) puts it, "the formal training of evaluators . . . left them unprepared for the precarious world of internal evaluation, particularly for the 'action settings' of human service organizations."

Even today there exists "a serious gap of knowledge about the conduct of internal evaluation" (Love, 1983, p. 1). This is particularly true of internal evaluation as practiced within education. More has been written about the practice of internal evaluation in other human service organizations.

Love (1983) views modern internal evaluation as the offspring of management review activities first conducted during the early part of the century to meet the business-industry demand for improved planning and control mechanisms. According to Love (1983):

> The evolution of internal evaluation as a staff support service is directly linked with the creation of systems departments to provide expert knowledge for managerial problem solving. Systems staff successively extended their range of skills from mastery of administrative systems and procedures to . . . decision-support systems. (p. 2)

Love (1983), Attkisson and Broskowski (1978), and Clifford and Sherman (1983) see modern internal evaluation in human service organizations as a management tool that supports planning by providing relevant and timely information on which managers can base decisions. Broskowski, White, and Spector (1979) view evaluation as a management responsibility delegated to staff specialists with technical training, whose responsibility is to assist the manager in making reasonable judgments based on systematic data collection and analysis. And Neigher (1979) sees the function of internal evaluation as helping program managers to improve their services.

According to Clifford and Sherman (1983):

> The internal evaluator is an employee of an organization who holds explicit primary responsibility for the organization's self-evaluation. The key terms here are internal, employee, and explicit responsibility. These three characteristics distinguish the internal evaluator from the consultant, the academic-based evaluation researcher, and the funding agency evaluator or monitor. (p. 23)

Clifford and Sherman (1983 p. 28) see the internal evaluator's basic role as that of "a management decision-support specialist" who must possess both technical and analytical skills, as well as interpersonal and organizational skills, and who is called upon to perform a number of roles: "planner, operations researcher, manager, organizational development consultant, management trainer and consultant, and data-processing or information specialist." Moreover, as Wildavsky (1985) points out, the internal evaluator is a problem solver, an adjunct and support to the planning and management process, a change agent who chooses to work inside the system to improve an organization's efficiency and effectiveness and increase the ability to change from within.

The internal evaluator is a member of the management team and, as such, must understand how management works. Ideally, the internal evaluator in human service organizations would function as do those in business and industry, where they are considered "generalists who are expert both in technical domains and in all aspects of the corporate operation" (Love, 1983, p. 2). Unfortunately, problems occur when internal evaluators try to implement this idealized role because they have faulty assumptions about the way managers operate. According to DeYoung and Conner (1982), evaluators historically have assumed that decision makers:

> have clarified and ordered the goals of the organization and pursue logical strategies for attaining these goals. The rational evaluator believes that the decision maker operates according to an overall plan of action and that he needs relevant information to select sound means to achieve desired ends. (p. 434)

Lynn (in Patton, 1981) maintains that decision makers do not like to approach problems intellectually. He describes managers as visceral people who approach issues with a wide variety of preconceptions: they may not like to read, they may not like data, and they may tend to see things couched in political terms. Lynn (in Patton, 1981, p. 87) argues that "there is no point in presenting some highly rational, comprehensive piece of work to [someone] who simply cannot or will not think that way." According to Weiss and Weiss (1981, p. 837), decision makers see themselves as "pragmatic, action-oriented, responsible, and informed in the ways of the world." Mintzberg (in Love, 1983, p. 26) depicts managers as people who tend to process information sequentially, with the most recent pieces of information having a disproportionate impact on their decisions, and who "tend to rely heavily on oral input and to assign 'decision worth' to information as a function of its source, not of the methodology used to collect it." Broskowski, White, and Spector (1979) report that:

> Managers prefer conversation, brief memos, and opening new mail to reviewing lengthy written reports on issues outside their control . . . [and] respond best to information that is readily available, relevant to immediate concerns, and reduced to the smallest possible volume of words and figures. (p. 108)

It is fairly obvious that, to be effective, internal evaluators must make a major attitudinal adjustment. Lynn (in Patton, 1981, p. 87) stresses that "a major craft skill needed by policy and evaluation analysts is the ability to understand and make accommodations for specific decision makers' style and other personal characteristics." They need to understand that managers use an unstructured decision process, that strategy formation is discontinuous and adaptive rather than formal (Mintzberg, 1979). Clifford and Sherman (1983) maintain that evaluators should help managers become better managers by bringing them to the point where they ask for information during the planning stage. They suggest that evaluators adopt the manager's perspective by empathizing with the latter's role in the organization.

Additionally, internal evaluators must understand that their role is one of advisor or consultant to management. Evaluators must not put themselves in the position of making executive or line decisions; their function is "to support the decision-making process, not to usurp it" (Clifford and Sherman, 1983, p. 28). And they should communicate information in a language easily understood by management. Cox (in Schulberg and Jerrell, 1979) maintains that:

> Managers will utilize evaluation results only to the degree that they are perceived as relevant to the issues about which they are concerned; . . . managers are but casually concerned about methodological validity; . . . evaluative data should be communicated verbally, succinctly, simply, and frequently. (pp. 14-15)

Evaluators must realize that the ability of an internal evaluation unit to conduct technically-sound studies is not sufficient to ensure its usefulness to management. Sproull and Larkey (1979, p. 100) maintain that an evaluator must "be around," must become an "insider" inasmuch as possible. At the very least, he must be present and available most of the time so as to have frequent, short conversations with managers and their sources of information.

Broskowski, White, and Spector (1979) believe that an internal evaluation unit is most effective when its staff is welcome to participate in the highest-level meetings and discussions regarding agency policies and plans. Attkisson and Hargreaves (in Schulberg and Jerrell, 1979, p. 11) believe that the optimal placement of such a unit is at the hub of the organization, "with prompt access to the most recent program data and direct responsibility to the organization's chief administrator." Clifford and Sherman (1983) concur that access to the top is essential in maintaining familiarity with emergent organizational issues, but acknowledge that this position is seldom bestowed on initiates; rather, it is earned bit by bit. Evaluation earns influence only by providing useful services.

Evaluation units can provide particularly useful services to all levels of management by implementing a system to maximize the use of information in decision making (Clifford and Sherman, 1983). Broskowski, White, and Spector (1979, p. 116), who see the ability to provide information quickly as a major criterion of an organization's evaluation capacity, argue that "the critical skill is anticipating management information needs and in collecting and storing the data in a fashion which makes it readily retrievable and subject to a variety of analyses." By so doing, evaluation units can supply data relevant to emerging problems and issues before the latter become crises and, hence, establish credi-

bility with management through a responsive evaluation capacity.

Our search of educational literature revealed no source comparable to Love's treatment of internal evaluation in other human service organizations. Kean (1983), however, does provide a review of administrative uses of research and evaluation information in education. Although he does not distinguish between internal and external evaluation, his emphasis appears to be on the use made of information provided by in-house research and evaluation units. Many of his points parallel to some extent those found in the literature of other human service organizations.

Kean notes that boards of education and school administration have come to depend increasingly on research and evaluation data. School district offices of research and evaluation typically are expected to respond to more clients than most other service agencies. The clients include superintendents; associate, assistant, and district/area superintendents; principals, instructional supervisors, and teachers; offices of funded programs, program and project directors; city governments and government agencies; colleges and universities, outside research groups, and individual researchers; the media; and students (Kean, 1983).

As Kean (1983, p. 390) maintains, "timing is all-important if research and evaluation results are to have genuine impact on policy." Additionally, evaluators should relate a study's results to the general context of the school system, give non-technical overviews of the specific results to managers, and point out the relationship of the results to the needs of the system and the specific policy implications derived from the study.

Cooley and Bickel's (1986) case study of their six-year collaboration with the Pittsburgh schools is a particularly useful source of information in that their focus is "similar in some respects to the arena Love (1983) and others have called 'internal evaluation.'" (p. 4) Cooley and Bickel (1986) describe their decision-oriented educational research (DOER) as follows:

> The distinguishing feature is that the research is guided by the information needs of the people responsible for that system. It is usually conducted by employees of an educational system or by researchers who are working closely with such systems and who have their research agendas established by the information needs of the educational system. (p.4)

Cooley and Bickel learned to take a systems view of the research context by searching for the interrelationships among system components. They came to understand that research must be organized so as to anticipate and respond to the information needs of various district managers/policy shapers, and to define potential clients for information. Cooley and Bickel also learned that a research unit must have reasonable access to key policy shapers to facilitate the ongoing communication of information needs. Essentially, they found that integration of the research process into the larger system can occur, and that a wide range of tasks and applications can be made of this resource when it assumes a client orientation.

As internal evaluators in a large urban school system, the authors of this paper have learned to market their talents to the managers of various elements of the school system. We have performed mail and telephone surveys to assist the superintendent in conducting a successful bond issue campaign; assisted in the development of numerous instructional and non-instructional programs; conducted descriptive and quantitative studies for departmental managers; provided

training in interviewing techniques, use of item specifications in writing test items, and test score interpretation; generated objective-referenced testing programs; and responded to every request a school center manager made of us. This sample of tasks represents the broadened domain of activities in which we continue to be involved. We tell managers how we might be able to help them, and then wait to be asked for assistance. Over time, we have made some headway and are moving slowly toward being used systemwide by many levels of management.

Our literature review produced several implications for improving the utility of internal evaluation units as tools for management: adopting the perspective of managers, cultivating frequent and direct access to top decision makers, anticipating management information needs, and communicating needed information at the right time in a language easily understood by management. It may be, however, that the greatest benefit of the review resides in the singular absence of a conceptualization of internal evaluation distinct from that of external evaluation in education. Borich (1985, p. 214) argues that the old definitions of evaluation do not apply to the practice of internal evaluation: "Now the internal evaluator works with management to collect data which can help managers make decisions which will improve the organization in some respect."

Knowing that Bill Cooley had recently finished several years of work on the inside of the Pittsburgh school system, the authors asked him if he saw a difference in the jobs of the internal and external evaluator. His answer was, "Definitely, yes" (personal communication, November, 1986). We feel the time has come to use what has been learned from the inside about the conduct of evaluation activities in a nonrational organization to train/retrain educational evaluators.

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